



DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS

PARENTALK

A Publication for Alabama's Parents

VOLUME 2 FALL 2009 BACK TO SCHOOL

10

Ways to Bring Out Your Child's Best

Adapted from Thomas Armstrong, *Awakening Your Child's Natural Genius* available by calling 1-800-247-6552

Richard loved to tinker with mechanical devices. As a 6-year-old, he took apart an alarm clock. At 9, he helped his dad fix the lawn mower. In high school, he spent hours tearing apart and rebuilding stereo equipment. Now, as a young adult, he's a sound technician for a professional theater company. Richard's parents encouraged his interests at an early age, which helped him become a successful adult. However, Richard was never labeled as "gifted." In fact, he had trouble with math in school. The definition of "the gifted child" has traditionally been based on school-related skills and limited to the upper 5 to 10 percent of children who achieve high test scores, write well and excel academically. These are certainly important, but there may be hundreds of other ways for children to show their gifts. An anonymous observer said, **"All children are gifted, some just open their packages later than others."** Studies at Harvard University bear this out, suggesting that kids can display intelligence in many different ways—through words, numbers, music, pictures, athletic or "hands-on" abilities, and social or emotional development. As a parent, "You can play a crucial role in awakening latent talents or developing current strengths through experiences you give your child at home. Here are 10 ways for you to bring out your child's best, no matter his age and regardless of how his gifts are packaged.

1 Free-time activities can say a lot about where your child's gifts lie. **Pay attention** to the activities she chooses. Does your young child want to build with Lego's™ or cook something with you? Does your teen sit and doodle or rhythmically bang on the furniture while humming a tune? These are clues to his interests and talents.

2 Help your child look beyond the commercialized movies, sports, TV shows, music and video games by exposing your child to a broad spectrum of experiences. Encourage your child to think about her future. Support her pursuit.

3 Use community events and institutions to activate interests. Visit the library, attend concerts together. Allow your child to participate in community activities that interest him. Suggest that he join a peer group that focuses on his gifts.

4 Give your child permission to make mistakes. If she has to do things perfectly, she won't take the risks necessary to discover and develop a gift. Encourage your child to tackle areas that are difficult to her. Follow Eleanor Roosevelt's suggestion, "Do something that scares you every day." Help her learn to confront her limitations and find solutions. Praise her efforts and encourage persistency.

5 Share inspirational stories of people who succeeded in life, keeping in mind that success does not have to involve money, fame or high intelligence. This is a good time to determine what your child's thoughts of success are and make realistic goals.

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Mountain-Sized Dreams

Although no one said it out loud, it was clear the first day that 7-year-old Keats Boyd would probably *not* make it to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro. At just four feet tall, the kid could barely conquer a fallen log. There was just no way he was going to make it all the way up Africa's tallest mountain.

That was obvious to everyone ... except for Keats. "It's not impossible to do something," Keats said. "You just have to believe in yourself to do it."

Keats doesn't come from a mountain-climbing family. In fact, his parents, Brian and Dana, say they don't even like stairs. They say their son got the bug a couple years ago after he saw a Kilimanjaro special on TV. Unfortunately, watching it and climbing it are two very different things.

Despite everyone's lowly expectations, Keats was all the way to within 3,000 feet of the top, when all of a sudden, the weather turned decidedly nasty, even by Kilimanjaro standards. They passed climbers who were giving up.

Five hours later, 7-year-old Keats Boyd became the youngest person to ever summit Mount Kilimanjaro. His dad by his side.

His parents still wonder; "what on earth is he going to want to do when he's eight?"

Story by CBS News Correspondent, Steve Hartman

7 Easy Steps to a Well-Organized Family

It's 7:15, your son is looking for his backpack, your daughter is crying because she doesn't know what to wear, you've still got to make their lunches and you need to be out the door in ten minutes. Don't you wish mornings were more organized?

If you spend a little effort up front, the benefits of organization can provide more time for you and your family and less time looking for things and rushing to get somewhere. We've compiled a list of 7 organizational tips to help get you started.

1 De-clutter We naturally are less stressed when our surroundings are de-cluttered and organized. Ask each family member to spend 45 minutes (some may require a whole day!) cleaning out his closet and dresser, placing out-of-date and outgrown items in a bag for donation or consignment. Remember, **it's not de-cluttering if the items stay in your house.** Take the bags to a local charity and check around for consignment sales.

Clean out the pantry and fridge in preparation for storage containers. Prepare some grab-and-go snacks such as individual fruit containers, nuts and granola bars. Keep these around for lunches and after-school snacks.

2 Take an hour on the Weekend to plan the week.

Make menus, grocery lists and calendars. Ask your kids what they have planned for the week, sign school papers and add all of this to the bulletin board. (see # 4-Command Central)

Plan complete outfits from socks to accessories and place in gallon-size plastic bags or a hanging canvas organizer. Label them with days of the week.



3 Thirty Minute Round-Up Not many of us are at our best in the mornings, so why overload ourselves with decisions and tasks that can be done the **night before**? Making some preparations in advance creates a less demanding morning, and, if everyone pitches in, should not take long. Prepare lunches the night before. While you're at it, set out breakfast items. Pack backpacks with homework, money, extra-curricular supplies and set by the back door, or better yet, put in the car. More items you put in the car the night before equals less chaos the morning of. Don't forget that preschoolers and teenagers alike can do most or all of these tasks.

Teaching kids early how to do these things eventually takes the responsibility off you, leaving more time for other things. Plus it gives them a sense of accomplishment.

4 Command Central One of the most basic and useful items of any organized family is a command center. This is the area where all communications are posted, calendars are updated, and keys, phones, sunglasses and jackets are kept. This can be a simple bulletin board with hooks or individual folders hung on the wall. Keep the center in a public place near the back door. Family schedules, announcements, memos and messages should be kept and updated here. You may want to have a calendar for each member in addition to the family calendar. Assign each member a different color for quick reference.

5 Make time for you in the morning Get up 15 or 30 minutes before the family and check mail, make a to-do list, read or exercise. Go ahead and get ready so you can focus on your children. The extra time will help improve your attitude-setting the tone for the morning.

6 Create Homework Stations Decide on the best spot in your home to set up homework areas for each child, keeping in mind the personality of each. Does Johnny focus better with others around or by himself? Is Sally better suited to sit at a table or curled up on the couch? Corral **homework tools and supplies for each person** into individual containers and store in a nearby bin or hang in an organizer on the back of a door.



What about all those papers that come home from school needing your attention; the piles of junk mail, bills and invitations? Hunting papers wastes time and when bills aren't paid or permission slips aren't turned in, the price for disorganization is paid in late fees and lost field trips. **Create a place for your homework, as well.** You

can share a space with your kids or designate a separate quiet area. Adopt one of the suggested storage solutions for your tools and supplies and keep near by. Set up a filing system for important papers and receipts. One option is to use a binder with tabs or a plastic accordion file. For the binder, use clear page protectors (found at office supply stores) and insert your papers. Label tabs for utilities, credit, banking, medical, etc. You might even want to have a separate binder for each child and file special papers and important documents such as copies of their birth certificates, immunization cards and school information.

7 Turn back the clock Sleep is when the brain gets reorganized. Getting enough sleep improves mood, concentration and decreases irritability. Generally, teens need an average of 9 hours of sleep per night. Younger children need at least 10. As adults, we need 8 or more. If your family member has a short attention span, is irritable, has unusually low energy or is more impatient than usual, he probably needs more sleep. Set a firm bed time and wake-up time for all members, which includes you! Limit late nights. Keep bedrooms dark and consider turning off or removing electronic devices from all bedrooms. Experts say that the **artificial light from computers and TV screens tells the brain that it's not time to wind down yet.** And every ring and ping from cell phones are debits from our sleep hours.

While we can't eliminate all the school-year stress, making these small adjustments should make it a little easier.

Getting Young children Ready to Learn



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Be the person you want your children to become.

Randy Carlson

Parents want their children to grow up to succeed in life. They want their children to feel like they can do anything they put their minds to. This "can-do" attitude comes from everyday experiences children have early in life when others notice and encourage their efforts.

Outside of the family, one of the first places children have a chance to do well is in school. For young children, doing well in school means being ready to learn. Being ready to learn is much more than knowing the alphabet and counting to ten. Readiness requires that children develop their physical abilities, language skills, self-control, social skills and desire to learn.

Part of being ready for school means that young children have learned how to cooperate and get along with others. This helps children beginning school to make friends. Children who make friends tend to do better in school.



Social Skills for a Can-Do Kid

- Feels comfortable with other children.
- Shows awareness of other children and their interests.
- Understands the rights of others.
- Stands up for own rights and avoids being taken advantage of.
- Plays cooperatively and is generally positive with other kids.
- Shows consideration and empathy for others.
- Treats others fairly.
- Shows self-control with others.



Parents' Guide to Developing Social Skills

- Use **positive discipline** to teach self-control.
- Take time to **understand** children's points of view.
- Show **empathy** for their feelings.
- Help them **think** about how their behavior toward others can create or **solve problems**.
- Join children's play, do what they do, **have fun together**.
- Help them find **non-physical** alternatives to express their feelings.
- Model** correct behavior.

Self-control-skills begin early in life when adults respond promptly and sensitively to babies' needs, helping them feel secure. Toddlerhood is the time when children begin learning to wait, to resist temptation and to meet adult standards for behavior. Adults must now set rules that are reasonable. Good discipline teaches children what good behavior is and why misbehavior is not acceptable.



Self-Control Skills for a Can-Do Kid

- Expresses strong feelings in acceptable ways.
- Waits for something instead of insisting on it immediately.
- Understands the connection between behaviors and consequences.
- Deals with anger and frustration in non-violent ways.



Parents' Guide to Developing Self-Control Skills

- State simple rules **clearly** and **calmly**.
- Help young children find ways to follow **simple rules**. (Simon-Says)
- Anticipate** young children's actions and remind them of the rules before they break them.
- Tell children what they **CAN** do rather than just what they cannot do. ("You can play with your toys. You cannot play with the remote control.")
- Notice and **encourage** children when they are behaving well.
- Redirect** unwanted behavior by offering acceptable alternatives.
- Explain** how children's misbehavior affects others.

Children develop language skills from their interactions with others. Parents' use of language and their responses to children's attempts to communicate guide language learning. By talking with infants and toddlers, adults help them connect sounds with meaning.



Language Skills for a Can-Do Kid

- Listens to, understands and talks with others.
- Understands simple instructions.
- Understands a wide variety of everyday words. Uses words to identify objects.
- Listens and pays attention to short stories, songs and rhymes.
- Responds to simple questions.
- Describes simple feelings. (Happiness, fear, anger)



Parents' Guide to Developing Language Skills

- Infants & Toddlers**
- Repeat** rhymes ~ **Sing** songs ~ **Read** simple books ~ **Describe** to them what they are doing or feeling ~ **Talk** to them about the activities of every day life ~ **Repeat** children's speech sounds and translate them into sensible, everyday words.
- Preschoolers**
- Encourage** them to talk about what they do each day ~ Ask them **questions** ~ **Read** books and talk together about the stories ~ Encourage them to use **new words** ~ Take time to **listen attentively**.

Adults with a GED or HS Diploma earn \$158 more a week than those without. A college degree will earn you \$504 more a week.

You've succeeded in getting your kids back to school. Now, it's time to think about you. If you are among the 39 million adults who never graduated from high school, then you've probably wondered about the benefits of a GED. Perhaps those who have dropped out of high school know better than anybody how valuable a high school diploma is. It can be the key to a higher education, a more competitive salary, and greater employment opportunity.

Better paying jobs.

Adults without a high school diploma or GED typically earn \$19,400 annually, which is below the federal poverty line, and usually require further assistance to provide for their families. The types of jobs available for those without a GED are cashiers, sheet-metal workers, and some customer service positions.

Adults with a GED or High school diploma earn \$158 more than those without, which adds up to over \$8,000 a

year and \$385,000 over a lifetime. This can make a huge impact on a family's budget!

With the unemployment rate for those without a GED or high school diploma at 27%, many are seeking a GED.

IS A GED IMPORTANT?

Path to a higher education.

A college degree can put \$500 more a week in your pocket than if you didn't have a degree and it can provide a career with advancement. Accredited colleges typically do not accept students without a GED, including community and technical schools.

Better your family.

Parents who get their GED are more likely to encourage their children to get an education. 91% of children whose parents do not have a GED or high school degree live in low-income families. Getting your GED increases your families' financial security.

Better yourself.

If you are the typical parent, you are always doing for your family, leaving your own interests and goals at bay. By obtaining your GED, you can have the sense of accomplishment and hope for a better future.

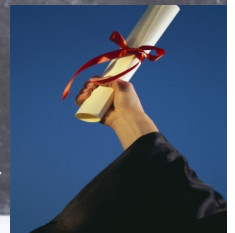
What can you do?

If you are an Alabama resident without a high school diploma or equivalent, your GED is worth getting.

There is a lot of support for Alabamians seeking a GED:

- 2-1-1 Alabama Community Resource Directory provides information and resources. 211 is a free local call from anywhere in Alabama and is available 24/7.
- Web sites such as www.diplomaguide.com provide information and further links.

Register at an official testing center by calling the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education at 1-334-242-2900 or visit their web site, www.accs.cc.al.us



10 Ways to Bring Out Your Child's Best (continued)

6 Share your successes as a family. Talk about positive things you child did that day and praise his accomplishments. Honor your child's interests by participating with him. If your child likes to use his head to bounce the ball, enroll him in a community soccer league and attend with him. If he likes music, listen to his music with him. Set aside an area in the house for displaying creations and awards, no matter how insignificant you think they are.

7 Kirk Martin of Celebrate Calm, advises to redirect your child's mischievousness to positive behavior. If your teen sprays graffiti on the side of a building, redirect his talent by asking leaders of the school to include him in large art projects such as banners at school games, art for their newspaper or web site. If he talks his friends into wacky ventures, then guide him into a leadership or drama club.

8 Help her open up to the wonders of the world by asking intriguing questions like, "What would it be like if..." and fill in scenarios such as, "we didn't have the sun?", or, "What makes a clock tick?". Find the answers together. One parent says they write a "question of the day" on the fridge in the morning then discuss possible answers over dinner. Listen to your child's answers. The things she cares about most may provide clues to her special talents.

9 Involve your child in home improvement activities. Housekeeping, including cleaning and cooking, as well as reorganizing items and redecorating rooms will bring out any creativity. Unless they're being destructive, let them do it their way. They may have insight into a better way of doing things. Praise their sense of responsibility in completing the task.

10 Keep your own passions alive. Make time to involve

your child in your own interests and talents. They will be influenced by your example.

Just like our child, talents and gifts come in many different packages. One of the joys of parenthood is seeing these gifts come alive in our child. The role we play in developing these strengths will determine her success. Let's don't make the mistake of classifying a talent as insignificant or small. There are people who many would consider to have small talents who are far more effective than those who are considered, "big-timers." We might think that the weird voices our child makes is annoying, but his gift can lead to a career as a voice talent. It's important as parents that we become our child's cheerleader and regularly point out EVERY strength he has. We don't know where the strength might take him.

Further Reading:

Your Child's Strengths, Discover Them, Develop Them, Use Them, by Jenifer Fox, M-ED (Viking, 2008)

Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers, by Peter L. Benson (Jossey-Bass, 2008)

7 Tools for Cultivating Your Child's Potential, by Zan Tyler (Apologia Educational Ministries, 2009)

Need more help in deciding your own talents?

Go to www.toiletpaperentrepreneur.com/blog/how-to-find-your-hidden-talent.com